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FRENCH'S ACTING EDITION

MISTRESS RUNAWAY

(M. LEFUSE)

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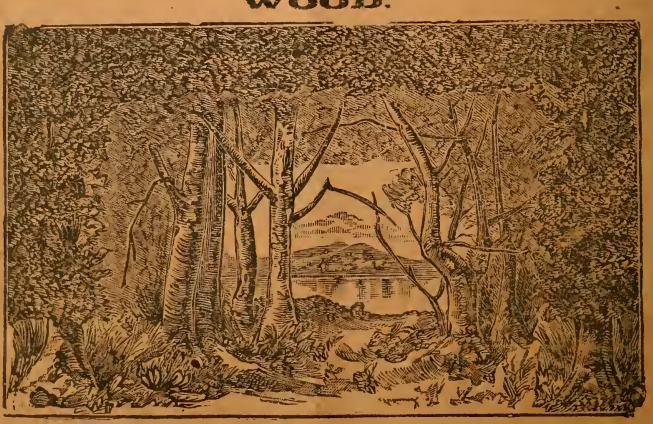

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MISTRESS RUNAWAY

MISTRESS RUNAWAY

A COMEDY FOR FOUR LADIES
IN ONE ACT

By
M. LEFUSE

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CHARACTERS

CLARISSA TOLLEMACHE, *a slight, pretty girl of eighteen.*

RUPERT PORTER, *a very slender, youthful, fashionable gallant. As his appearance, voice, and manner are all effeminate, this part is undertaken by a lady, the Georgian costume making this a simple matter.*

LANDLADY, *a stout, elderly countrywoman.*

SALLY, *a pert young waiting woman.*

PERIOD.—*George I.*

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MISTRESS RUNAWAY

A COMEDY FOR FOUR LADIES IN ONE ACT

SCENE.—*A small inn parlour. Door at* R. *back. Window at* L. *back. High screen between door and window, stretching into room. Fireplace with fire* L. *Settle on hearth. Oak chair and side table with drawers. Oak table* C.

At the beginning of the scene CLARISSA *and* SALLY *wear long travelling cloaks and hoods, which are afterwards removed.*

(*Enter* CLARISSA *and* SALLY *cloaked.* CLARISSA *goes quickly and sits on settle, pulls out handkerchief, and pats her eyes.*)

SALLY. Now, now, mistress, crying again! La! What's the use? 'Twill but spoil your eyes. We've put thirty good miles 'twixt us and madame, and I dare swear she's not found we've flown yet!

CLARISSA (*sighs*). Oh! but if she has! Think of her rage, Sally! She has the swiftest horses in the county, and—and—oh! well, Sally, you know what she would say if she caught us!

SALLY (*grimaces*). That I do, mistress! Why, two days ago she boxed my ears for just giving Tom the ostler a decent word or two! But she'll rue it!

(*Tosses her head.*) I'd have thought twice about aiding you to run away if she'd kept civil. As if a pretty maid could simmer up every time she was looked on by a man! If she did, she'd be like our cook-maid's kettle, never off the boil!

CLARISSA (*impatiently*). Oh! be quiet, Sally! Tell me what I'm to do!

SALLY. Do? Why, you must just wait here till the horses are rested before you can go on again. 'Tis not for long; in an hour at most we shall be on the road.

CLARISSA (*horrified*). An hour? Oh! a *thousand* aunts might arrive in an hour! (*To herself.*) How I came to find enough resolution to run away I don't know! (*Simpering a little.*) It shows how desperate I am! But I daren't stay at home any longer! (*To* SALLY.) I know now what old Colonel Porter meant, when he told my aunt she reminded him of the old Duchess of Marlborough. He fought at Blenheim, you know, Sally, and he knew the Duke quite well—and I suppose the Duchess too!

SALLY. And she was like your aunt! Lor! Mistress Clarissa, I always thought he was tougher than most! If he could live through a battle and a Duchess like your aunt *and* your aunt, and look as well as he does to-day—well, I shouldn't think he'd ever run a chance of dying!

CLARISSA (*sighing*). Ou—ou—ouff! What a wretched coward I am! Just feel how my heart beats! (*Lays hand on heart.*)

SALLY (*unsympathetically*). I expect you're hungry, mistress! If we ate a bit, it might hearten us both up.

CLARISSA (*horrified*). Oh, Sally! How *can* you talk of eating! (*Tragically.*) I shall never eat again! Hark! What's that? (*Springs to feet, terrified.*) Oh! It's a horse! It's a horse, Sally! (*Mistress and maid clutch each other.*) Oh! Sally, it'll be my aunt!

(*Both stand hesitating, then holding each other still, rush to window. Pause.*)

CLARISSA (*with relief*). Oh—o-oh! No, it's a man!

SALLY (*with satisfaction*). Ah—a-ah! And a groom as well!

(SALLY *turns from window as though to leave the room, but is recalled by* CLARISSA'S *exclamation.*)

CLARISSA. Why! Oh! It can't be—Sally, come quickly! Do you see! Isn't—isn't that the gallant who stared so when I was in London this spring? When I was choosing of my new sack—you remember?

(*Both heads go together; excited whispering, gesture, peering out of window, etc.* CLARISSA *turns from window, and stands looking down stage.*)

CLARISSA (*with sudden assumption of dignified indifference*). How—very—strange!

(*Enter* RUPERT PORTER, *talking to some one without. Screen prevents his seeing* CLARISSA *and* SALLY.)

RUPERT (*very crossly*). Oh! do as you like, do as you like! If the horses can't go on, why! they can't! Dinner? 'Pon my word, man, no! (*Lower.*) I feel as if I never wanted to eat again.

(*Stands* C. *down stage, talking to himself.*)

RUPERT. To be disposed of like a calf and then—asked to have one's *dinner!* (*Disgustedly.*) What's come over the world, I wonder!

(*Exit* SALLY.)

(CLARISSA *moves down and sits on settle back to* RUPERT, *who hearing movement turns to her.*)

RUPERT (*very softly*). Why! What is this? No—yes—it *is* the same! It can't be! It is!

(*Louder, advancing hat in hand.*) Er—er—er, I beg you, pardon me! I—I had no notion any one was here. Er—I did think of having dinner here—but if you wish me to retire—er—I should quite understand.

CLARISSA (*very demurely*). Sir, you are vastly kind, but—er—this is a public parlour!

(*Short silence;* CLARISSA *stares pensively at fire.* RUPERT *stares at* CLARISSA, *drops a glove, fidgets from one foot to the other, finally stands opposite* CLARISSA *with back to fireplace.*)

RUPERT. The—er—the weather's vastly warm and pleasant to-day, isn't it?

CLARISSA (*sweetly*). Y-e-es! But it rained quite heavily this morning!

RUPERT (*confused*). So it did, I'd forgotten that.

(*Enter* LANDLADY.)

LAND. I dare swear you're ready for your dinner, sir?

RUPERT (*embarrassed*). Perhaps the young lady would object?

CLARISSA (*coldly*). Object to your dining? Oh! no, sir!

LAND. (*benevolently*). P'raps the young lady'll join you, sir!

RUPERT (*embarrassed*). Oh—er—I hardly, I——

CLARISSA (*modestly to* LANDLADY). If 'twill oblige I have no objections!

RUPERT (*delighted*). A thousand thanks, madam!

LAND. (*beaming*). Now I take that very kindly, missy—mistress, I should say! I'm a bit short-handed just now, and 'twill suit me better to set one table than two! (*Goes to side table, takes cloth from drawer, shakes it open.*) And you both be the gainers.

You won't neither of you feel so blushy-like while you're eating.

(CLARISSA *and* RUPERT *look horrified.* RUPERT *flings down his whip with a great clatter.*)

LAND. Dear life, sir! You might have broken it! Let me! (*Comes and takes whip and lays it on side table.*)

LAND. As I was saying, when *one* is eating, *two* had better! (*Spreads cloth on table* C. *Continues to go to and from side table, fetching spoons, etc.*) It breaks the ice in a manner of speaking, and, as I see the young gentleman knows, a man as is eating under any one's eyes gets a bit nervous, and then 'e gets a bit sloppy, and don't rightly know where 'e *is* putting his food, whether it's on 'is waistcoat or whether it's in his stom——

(RUPERT *raises his heel, and kicks over stand with poker, etc.* CLARISSA *lifts hands to ears.*)

LAND. (*jumps*). Dear life, sir! That's the second thing you've sent to the ground! (*Advances to fire-place, takes poker, etc., and places them on floor some distance away.*)

RUPERT (*rather low*). You'll forgive me, won't you, madam?

CLARISSA (*emphatically*). Oh! sir, I thank you!

LAND. (*returns to* RUPERT, *and takes his hat and gloves*). Best let me take these, sir! (*Soothingly.*) They'll be safer over here, sir, you being, if you'll pardon me, given to dropping things! (*Lays hat, etc., on chair near door. Opens door and takes in plates, dishes, etc. Places on table, and sets chairs to it.*)

CLARISSA (*rises*).

RUPERT (*aloud*). Permit me, madam. (*Hands* CLARISSA *to table. They seat themselves.*)

RUPERT (*to* LANDLADY). Thanks, my good woman,

we will manage for ourselves! Doubtless if you are short-handed 'twill be something easier for you!

LAND. Thank you kindly, sir! But 'tis no ill-convenience, only a pleasure!

CLARISSA (*shakes her head*). Ugh! (*To* LANDLADY.) But we would really rather—I mean, it must be very troublesome—— (*To* RUPERT.) Do you not agree, sir?

RUPERT (*with alacrity*). Oh, most certainly! (*To* LANDLADY.) I beg of you to retire.

LAND. (*huffily*). I have waited here on and off—— (*Stops and stares from* CLARISSA *to* RUPERT.) Well! to be sure! Of course I will! Now, why didn't I think of it before! (*Smiles broadly.*) Dear, dear! To think I should have forgot how I felt in *my* youth! Dear, yes! I was never one to want a third party when I was court——

(CLARISSA *and* RUPERT *bend over their plates, and make a great clatter with their knives and forks, drown end of* LANDLADY'S *speech. Exit* LANDLADY, *smiling and shaking head.*)

(*Pause.*)

RUPERT. Er—er—it's been vastly warm and pleasant to-day, hasn't it?

CLARISSA. Ye-e-es! Only it did rain greatly this morning, didn't it?

RUPERT. Now you mention it, I—think it did.

(*Both eat steadily, and seem to have hearty appetites. Presently* CLARISSA *pushes away plate, and leans back in chair.*)

RUPERT (*solicitously*). Surely you have not finished?

CLARISSA (*sighs deeply*). Oh! sir, when the mind is troubled the body needs but little sustenance!

(RUPERT *puts down fork and pushes away plate.*)

RUPERT (*gloomily*). Too true, madam!

CLARISSA. Surely, sir, you have not finished?

RUPERT. Madam, I am like you, I can touch nothing!

(*Both sigh deeply.*)

RUPERT (*leaning forward across table*). Mistress, you are too fair to bear trouble alone! (*Softly.*) Will you not confide in me? Can I not help you!

CLARISSA (*with heroic firmness, staring straight in front of her*). Sir, no man can help me! (*Dabs eyes with handkerchief.*) I—I am the victim of an unloving relative! A—a relative who under the guise of wishing me well, would rid herself of me! I—I could bear it no longer, so (*very plaintively*) I have run away!

RUPERT (*startled*). Heavens! Madam, what mean you? Your relative would rid herself of you! She—she has not tried to—to murder you?

CLARISSA (*startled*). Oh! No, sir! (*Dismally.*) But she has tried to marry me!

RUPERT (*starts to his feet*). How very strange!

CLARISSA (*coldly*). Sir!

RUPERT (*excitedly*). Why, mistress, 'tis just my case! I, too, have a relative who from motives of avarice would force me into marriage!

CLARISSA. Why, 'tis too extraordinary! But perhaps the lady pleases you?

RUPERT. How can she please me? I have never seen her, never heard of her; do not even know her exact age! At least, I mean I knew nothing of her when I was ordered to (*bitterly*) put myself up for sale before this heiress like a calf! Since then, however, I have made inquiries! (*Nods sagely.*)

CLARISSA (*breathlessly*). Ah! 'Tis just what I did! 'Tis a town gallant they would wed me with, so I wrote and begged a friend to tell me *truly* what like he is! Do you think it was right?

RUPERT (*leans on table*). The wisest thing in the world, mistress; why, I did it myself! Well! I

was nearly worn into a fever with expectancy, and then (*dismally*) the answer came!

CLARISSA (*dismally*). So did mine!

RUPERT. I have the letter with me now. Ah! madam, may I read it to you? You who—who are so sweet and a—a model to your sex, will be able to tell me if I did right to instantly refuse!

CLARISSA (*blushing*). Nay, sir, if I aid you, you must in turn give me your advice!

RUPERT. 'Tis a bargain!

(*Both produce letters.*)

RUPERT (*reading*). "— your absurd——" h'm! where is it? Oh! "— very much amused——" bah! H'm! oh! here it is! "Well, yes, I have both seen and spoken with the young lady, and to be quite candid, dear boy, I wouldn't have her even with the gilding!"

CLARISSA. Oh! What a brutal way of putting it!

RUPERT (*apologetically*). He *is* something of an ass, but, poor fellow, he spends half the year ploughing and hunting! (*Reads.*) "When I last saw her, she was a raw-boned, under-sized filly——" I, I beg your pardon! He—he means she was rather—thin, you know—"But 'tis a year since I saw her, and they may have fed her up since then——" (*Timidly.*) I—I am afraid he must be always in the stables. (*Reads.*) "For the rest, I judged her free from vice, the sort of creature my wife calls 'bread and buttery'!" (*Lays down letter.*) Now tell me, am I not right to refuse?

CLARISSA (*emphatically*). I'm sure you are! I never heard such a dreadful description! Now, will you advise *me?* (*Opens letter and reads.*) "As to the matter you speak of, I will try and get a white lace——" Oh! oh! that's not it! Ah! here it is! (*Reads.*) "If you really wish to know if I approve of rouge——" Oh! oh! *That's* not it! Ah! (*Reads*). "— know him quite well, and personally

I wouldn't have him a gift! He is vain and empty-headed; clumsy on his feet, and rather loutish with but an overlay of modish manners, and with no trait of manliness about him. Not at all suitable to my sweet Clarissa, whom I feel sure he wouldn't have the courage to protect from a mouse!" It doesn't sound pleasing, does it?

RUPERT. Indeed, it doesn't! Take my advice, and have nothing to say to him!

CLARISSA (*sighing*). I won't! Isn't it strange we should both have the same trouble?

RUPERT (*tenderly*). Fate must have meant us to be comrades! Madam, I have not been quite open with you. If this heiress (*taps letter*) had been Venus herself she could never have won my heart! (*Lowers voice.*) For it went from me last spring into the keeping of a maid whose name I do not even know!

CLARISSA (*half turns away*). I—I—oh! it's *very* odd we should be both alike! (*Emphatically.*) Oh! I will *never* obey my aunt!

RUPERT (*energetically*). Nor I my uncle! I will go straight to him and say (*rises, strikes attitude of defiance*), "Uncle Porter!" (CLARISSA *starts violently.*) "I'll none of your plans! Keep your money, or marry this Tollemache creature *yourself* if you will!"

(CLARISSA *rises very slowly to her feet, turns to face* RUPERT *with a furious expression.*)

CLARISSA (*icily*). And I, sir, I will go to my aunt and say: "Aunt Tollemache, if there *must* be marrying, go and marry this Porter monster *yourself!*" (RUPERT *staggers back aghast.*)

CLARISSA (*furiously*). How dare you! Oh! how dare you! Coward! Mean coward! Writing to your low friends and playing at pitch and toss with my name! (*Stamps.*) Oh! I could kill you! (*Makes close up to him, and draws herself up.*) Look at me! Am I undersized! (*Flings wide her arms.*)

Am I raw-boned? Am I—am I (*her voice ascends*) bread and buttery! Oh-o-o-o-oh! (*Turns away from him.*) I who am the toast of the county to be so insulted—to dare to write of me!

(RUPERT *throughout her speech has attempted to pacify her with questions.*)

RUPERT (*hardly*). Well, mistress, well! (*Louder.*) You wrote about me! (*More angrily, but looking sideways at* CLARISSA.) Am I empty-headed? Am I not modish? Am I vain and loutish? (*Stands over her threateningly.*) Am I not worth a gift? Oh-o-o-o-oh!

(*During* RUPERT'S *speech the door opens, and the* LANDLADY *and* SALLY *are seen peering round door.* LANDLADY *takes a step forward to interpose anxiously when* SALLY *seizes her arm, saying: "Come out!" and leads her from the room.*)

CLARISSA (*very angrily*). It was unpardonable!

RUPERT (*very angrily*). Undoubtedly it was!

CLARISSA (*with dignity*). Sir, I pray you not to add mockery to your offence!

RUPERT. I pray *you*, madam, not to attempt to justify your conduct.

CLARISSA (*furiously*). Justify *my* conduct! Why, 'tis for you to——

RUPERT (*interrupting*). No! 'tis for you to——

CLARISSA (*interrupting*). I vow 'tis you to——

RUPERT (*interrupting*). I vow 'tis not——

CLARISSA AND RUPERT (*both stamping angrily*). O-o-o-oh-oh!

(RUPERT *walks to window.* CLARISSA *walks to fireplace.*)

CLARISSA (*wipes eyes*). To think that you should be the man I fled from!

RUPERT (*gloomily*). To think that you should be

the lady I refused. (*Comes down stage and collects hat, gloves, and whip.*) (*Sadly.*) 'Twas only last spring——

CLARISSA (*sobs*). Yes! 'Twas only last spr-i-ing—

RUPERT (*gloomily*). When you were buying a new sack——

CLARISSA (*wipes eyes*). And you were buying ribbons for your cane——

RUPERT (*despairingly*). That I should ha' wished myself the garment you were buying that I might be always near you! (*In his emotion drops hat, gloves, etc.*)

CLARISSA (*pitifully*). It—it—it never fitted!

RUPERT (*picking up letter from table*). To have my happiness destroyed by this!

CLARISSA (*sharply*). By a lie!

RUPERT (*stands confounded staring at letter, then turns to* CLARISSA). True, madam! By a lie! Why —'tis only truth need stand 'twixt honest folk! (*Tears up letter, and throws on fire.*) There! 'tis gone! (*Tenderly.*) Can you not do the same?

CLARISSA (*softly*). With all my heart!

RUPERT (*joyfully*). Then—then we can begin again with nothing but our love between us! (*Takes* CLARISSA *in his arms.*)

(*Door opens,* LANDLADY *and* SALLY *look in. Seeing nothing, advance to screen and peer round to fireplace.* SALLY, *on seeing* CLARISSA *in* RUPERT'S *arms, advances smiling.* LANDLADY *seizes her arm, and saying firmly, "Come out," leads her from the room.*)

CLARISSA (*sits on settle*). 'Tis a strange world! To think I should have run away from you only——

RUPERT. Only to run into my arms! (*Kneels beside her.*) Ah! is it not a *wonderful* world?

CLARISSA (*nodding*). I can't think why people are unhappy in it! It is such a *dear* place!

RUPERT. So fair.

CLARISSA. So hopeful! (*Lets hand fall to side;* RUPERT *kisses it.*)

RUPERT. So full of beauty!

CLARISSA. So free from fear and——

(*Door flung open.* LANDLADY *and* SALLY *enter scared and breathless.* RUPERT *springs to his feet.*)

LAND. Dear life, sir; there's a coach just driven in a-gallop with the horses all a-sweat and the gentleman a-swearing awful——

SALLY. Oh! Mistress Clarissa, 'tis your aunt and Colonel Porter! And your aunt's swearing the worst of the two!

CLARISSA (*horrified*). My aunt! } *together.*
RUPERT (*surprised*). My uncle! }

CLARISSA (*terrified*). Oh! What shall we do?

RUPERT (*laughing*). We shall give them a pleasant surprise! (*To* LANDLADY.) Bring them here, I pray you!

(*The* LANDLADY *and* SALLY *bustle out.*)

RUPERT (*takes* CLARISSA *by both hands*). Sweetheart, we have nothing now to fear!

CLARISSA (*sweetly*). No! now that we're together!

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